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ABSTRACT

As part of the follow-up of the reform in Swedish higher education and as a complement to regular program evaluation, a program of follow-up studies within the framework of the research and development activities has been undertaken. Main problem areas include: the institutional organization of higher education; social effects; and the content and forms of higher education. Each of these areas is discussed and an activity evaluation project is described. (LBH)

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INFORMATION ON RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

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THE UHÄ PROGRAMME FOR THE FOLLOW-UP OF THE REFORM OF HIGHER EDUCATION

PURPOSE AND FORMS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH EDUCATION & WELFARE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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The reform of higher education implies some change of the frames of university and college activities. One purpose of the reform is to establish better conditions for planning, development and renewal to meet the growing and increasingly diverse demands upon research and higher education. In many respects, however, the proposed reform can be looked upon as hypotheses, that will need to be tested and gradually adjusted. Everybody in higher education therefore should be concerned with the follow-up and evaluation of the reform measures and their effects related to their own activities and thereby contribute to a continuous development.

As part of the follow-up of the reform and as complement to the evaluation taking place in the course of regular activities, the UHÄ has started a programme of follow-up studies within the framework of its research and development (R & D) activities. This follow-up programme is not meant to replace the activities in this field of other persons or at other levels but to be one of several complementary efforts.

The purpose of the follow-up programme is to contribute to the improvement of documentation for decision making concerning some of the measures,

Universitets- och högskoleämbetet
P.O. Box 16334
S-103 26 Stockholm SWEDEN
PHONE
08-14 10 00

changes and initiatives which is needed for a continuous development. The projects, therefore, will be action oriented, which means that procedures and methods of investigation will be suited not only to the nature of the problems but also to the levels, bodies or persons who are meant to use the results of the investigations in their own decision making and activities.

The best documentation is worthless if, for some reason, it is ignored by the intended recipients. One reason for such disregard could be that they do not feel that the investigation concerns them closely enough or that they have not taken sufficient part in the intentions and strategy of the investigation. As far as scientific demands and methods permit, the intended users should be enabled to participate at the planning stage, and sometimes also in the actual conduct of a project. The "activity evaluation" and "project orientation" projects described below both provide instances of "consumer" representatives taking part in the entire project process via conferences, seminars and courses and by connecting the projects to current development work in the respecitve fields. In other types of project, however, this close co-operation between project group and recipients is neither possible nor desirable. More attention then has to be devoted to the dissemination of results.

Many of the projects will require an interdisciplinary approach, due to the fact that information of interest in a practically oriented research programme of this kind seldom can be integrated within a single subject or research field. This presents certain difficulties which will prolong the work of the projects.

PROBLEMS AND PROJECT CONTENT

The UHÄ follow-up programme will not imply any attempt to produce a comprehensive picture or to make sweeping comparisons of the situation "before" and "after". The programme contains project plans and projects which are intended to cover a number of principal problems. The intention is not only to study effects in relation to aims but also to carry out more penetrating studies of the processes underlying the superficial phenomena. The following are the main problem areas within the programme.

- The institutional organization of higher education
- Social effects
- The content and forms in higher education

Some examples will now be given of current project plans, together with a more detailed description of the two projects which started in 1976.

THE INSTITUTIONAL ORGANIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The reform of higher education involves a series of organizational changes which are aimed at increased decentralization and better co-operation within the educational system as well as closer contact between education and working life. The purpose of a couple of projects is to study in detail the functioning and co-operation of different bodies and to identify their shortcomings and weaknesses. Special attention will be paid to such novel constructions as programme committees and regional boards. Comparative studies of units and regions may also prove fruitful.

SOCIAL EFFECTS

One of the most important measures to make higher education available to more people can be seen in the new rules for entrance qualifications and admissions. Although the social goals concerning admissions to higher education is quite clear, it is far from certain that the proposed rules will operate in the intended direction. A study of the effects of the admission rules will therefore have to include a detailed analysis of their implications for different groups of students and different types of education. The study should also be related to a wider context and include consideration of relations to preceding school systems and interaction with the labour market. It will also be of interest to study not only those getting into the system but to ascertain the consequences for those who fail to gain admission. There are many people who have the necessary qualifications but who for various reasons are forced to abstain from a desirable course of higher education.A survey is needed of the residual impediments.

Different educational routes in higher education need to be followed up and studied. There is still a pronounced social stratification of different types of education. The tendency towards recurrent education, needs to be carefully analysed, not least with reference to its social effects.

The importance of higher education to the labour market and to the vocational prospects of the individual implies demands on higher education of which far too little is known. Some of these questions will be investigated in projects within the follow-up programme.

THE CONTENT AND FORMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Two studies are currently being planned focussing on various aspects of this complex of problems. In one of the projects a study will be made of the emergence of educational opportunities in the new organization within a region and of the student recruitment to which these opportunities give rise. The educational process will be followed within a number of particularly interesting lines of education, and a study will be made of the way in which teaching is designed and adapted to different student categories, of different educational routes and, possibly, of the post-educational sequel. In other words, the intention is to try to follow up what happens beneath the surface of a conventional statistical description of educational opportunities, student characteristics and student flows.

Another project will focus on the question of how the knowledge and skill of students with job experience can be utilized to enrich education and how the forms of teaching can be adapted to the needs and experience of different student categories, something that places heavy demands on the role of the teacher.

"Project orientation" is a radical attempt to divise solutions to a series of problems concerning the aims, content and forms of education. The project on this subject included in the follow-up programme is described below.

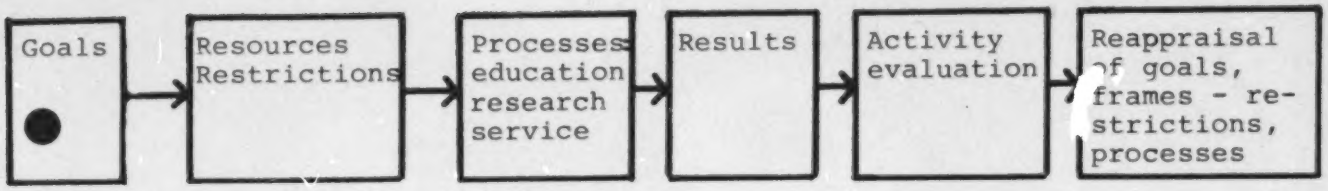
EVALUATION OF ACTIVITIES

The programme for the follow-up to the reform will thus provide documentation on some principal problems of higher education. Most points of inquiry, however, cannot be accommodated in this or any other programme. A great deal will have to be investigated in various ways by each individual in the course of his or her activities. As a contribution to a general activity evaluation in higher education, a project has been started which will furnish information about and further the development of methods, criteria and procedures in the autonomous assessment and renewal of activities. This project is described below.

Marianne Bauer

PROJECT CONCERNING ACTIVITY EVALUATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The following model can serve as a schematic illustration of the stages of planning in higher education.



Activities are governed by goals of different kinds and by the limitations imposed by resources and restrictions (laws and regulations, allocations, personnel, premises etc.), and they are conducted through the medium of processes concerning education, research and auxiliary activities (administration, libraries etc.). These activities have certain results. Evaluation of goals, resources and restrictions, processes and results - activity evaluation - provides a starting point for the reappraisal and alteration of activities.

INITIAL ASSUMPTIONS AND PRINCIPLES

The National Board of Universities and Colleges in Sweden has started a project on activity evaluation. Why do we use this term "activity evaluation" instead of, for instance, "assessment of results"? One reason is that the effects of education and research become apparent in the long term, and that, consequently, no feedback to reappraisal and change would be obtainable if all efforts were concentrated on the evaluation of results. Surveys of activities, therefore, are also used in order to facilitate predictions of results. But the term "activity evaluation" also implies a desire to make evaluation include all components of the activities and to pay close attention to the processes.

Of course, evaluations of various kinds are already being practised. The purpose of the present project is to elaborate criteria, methods and systems of activity evaluation in higher education and research. What reasons are there for doing this and for giving more scope to

activity evaluation? At least four motives can be distinguished.

1) The reform of higher education in Sweden. The reduction of central detailed control and the freer deployment of resources both enlarge the need for accounting activities. Activity evaluation partly replaces prior control.

2) The emergence of mass higher education. New categories of students and new educational needs have developed. Higher education must respond to this situation by evaluating and reappraising its activities.

3) The steep quantitative growth of higher education, a process which has been going on throughout the post-war era, has now passed its peak, and future growth seems bound to be considerably more restrained. Changes and new activities can no longer be facilitated to the same extent by the provision of new resources. Revisions of priorities will also be needed, leading to the reduction or discontinuation of a number of existing activities.

4) The conditions of human life are changing rapidly and uninterruptedly. Changing demands call for a great deal of continuous and local initiative and adaptability.

But apart from these topical reasons, it is fair to say that activity planning and evaluation have not been allowed sufficient scope hitherto.

Activity evaluation has many different dimensions, including the following: 1) formal economic auditing, 2) cost accounting, 3) quantitative result control, 4) everyday rationalization, 5) activity reports to superior bodies, 6) the determination by superior bodies of priorities regarding financial allocations and the design of activities 7) self-evaluation and self-renewal.

Components like these must all be included in activity evaluation, but the emphasis of the project will be on developing the seventh, fifth and sixth dimensions, in that order of priority. The general aim of the project is to help to develop higher education in the direction of a self-evaluating and self-renewing system.

CONDUCT OF THE PROJECT

The project began in the autumn of 1976 with planning work, which among other things included discussions of the project at conferences and courses attended by representatives of different activities and functions in higher education. Work in 1977 will focus on the accumulation of a basic store of knowledge and on the more detailed identification of the problems to be tackled and the methods to be used. This work will involve both practical and theoretical aspects and will among other things include a review of relevant literature and studies of existing activity evaluation at Swedish and American universities. Courses and conferences will continue to be held under the auspices of the project during 1977.

A preliminary report containing certain essential guidelines will be compiled during 1977. The report will provide a foundation for discussions within higher education establishments and for practical experiments and further development.

SOME FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS

A few examples will be mentioned here of problems whose importance is apparent from the very outset of the project and which will provide topics of further study.

Activity evaluation presupposes that evaluation can result in changes. A self-evaluating organization must be able to act on the consequences of its evaluation by changing itself. But organizations have built-in defence mechanisms against changes, or at least against changes which do not coincide with their ideology and technology and with the interests of their members. How can an organization be made to include mechanisms which are conductive to self-evaluation and self-transformation? Or must changes which threaten the system be imposed from above?

Activity evaluation also presupposes experimentation, because changes sometimes have to be tried out in practice before being introduced all along the line. Experiments of this kind may need to cover not only teaching and learning but also such areas as decision-making systems, institutional organization, system of finance, the structure of appointments etc. How are opportunities for this type of experimentation to be opened up in a system as traditionally centralized as higher education in Sweden.

The goals of higher education are complex and sometimes contradictory. Goal achievement is hard to measure, especially in the short run. How can criteria and indicators be devised which will provide a basis for assessment of effectiveness (goal achievement)? Perhaps evaluation must be based to a great extent on presumed connections between the design of the process and its results? What does this require in terms of research and experimentation, e.g. regarding goals which are not specific to individual disciplines (attitudes, values, critical ability, creativity, problem solving ability etc.)?

Activity evaluation is very liable to be dominated by these aspects of activities and results which are most amenable to quantitative description. How can a proper balance be struck between qualitative and quantitative aspects?

It is difficult for activity evaluation to obtain sufficient scope (a difficulty it shares with activity planning in general), because day-to-day work commandeers a high priority ranking. Repetitive processes which are characteristic of bureaucracies (and the higher education system is a bureaucracy, among other things) dominate administrative activities at the expense of dynamic and creative processes. Continuous activity evaluation must imply that more scope is given to dynamic and innovative processes.

This brings us on to the question of the working forms within activity evaluation. Written reporting (annual reports etc.) is of course necessary, but the main emphasis must be on other, more creative written methods, viz conferences, seminars, ad hoc project groups, special studies, development projects, action research, the engagement of outside consultants.

The main problem where annual reports and other written reporting are concerned is to keep information to a minimum. Otherwise we will be engulfed by it. A decision-maker must not ask for the greatest possible amount of information but for the smallest possible amount of information on which a decision can be based.

Activity evaluation includes all levels of the higher education systems: departments, programme committee and faculty level, the university, the regional level and the National Board of Universities and Colleges (UHÄ). But points of emphasis and strategies of evaluation will vary from one level to another.

Publications

The following report has been published so far (in Swedish):

"Activity evaluation. A project and a conference. UKÄ-report 1976:3".

Further reports will be published in 1977.

Bertil Östergren

PROJECT ORIENTATION IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

The amount of knowledge to be assimiliated in individual disciplines is rapidly growing, and this makes it difficult for subject studies to acquire depth and stringency within the limited time available. Such a tendency may appear to conflict with demands for greater vocational relevance, social orientation and training in practical problem solving.

One way out of this dilemma could be to organize education partly or entirely in project form, either across the subject boundaries or within disciplines. Advanced experiments of this kind have long been in progress in Germany, Denmark and other countries. In Sweden too, several experimental schemes of project-based studies have been started on various scales.

The project approach has both advocates and opponents. Some believe that project orientation will be the salvation of the world, while others consider a decline in knowledge and scientific standards to be its only possible results. The truth of the matter seems to be that project orientation has yet to be proved either good or bad. Experiments are in progress but we are not yet in a position to draw any universal conclusions.

It is in everybody's interest for the tendency termed project orientation to be critically examined in the best sense and for the experience accruing from current experiments to be recorded and disseminated.

Teachers and educational planners, students, workers' associations and employers all have a legitimate interest in acquiring a foundation on which to evaluate the potentialities of project orientation and assess the conditions which have to be satisfied in order for experiments in this direction to be successful. A project on project orientation has therefore been launched during the current fiscal year (1976/77).

The purpose of this project is to produce a coherent and lucid description of theories underlying Swedish and foreign experiments in project-based studies, together with the experience thus gained, and also by means of seminars, questionnaires and other forms of information to lay the foundations of an improved and - in the best sense of the term- critical interchange of opinions between individual teachers and students or groups of teachers and students concerning this way of organizing studies. A third aim is to

acquire better documentation for educational planning at various levels.

ACTIVITIES SO FAR

Kjell Askeland, who has previously had experience of evaluating the Roskilde University Centre in Denmark, has been appointed to take charge of the project. During 1976/77 he intends to collaborate with the UHÄ and the members of the seminar mentioned below to compile a survey of the theory and practice of project orientation.

Three seminars were held on project orientation during the autumn. These seminars form part of the staff development conducted in higher education, and the participants also served as a reference group for the written material which is to be produced for the assistance of teachers and administrators who are interested in the possibilities of project orientation. This represents an attempt to produce an alternative to the reporting which usually takes place in the form of a long silence followed by a concluding document. The seminar includes representatives of all universities and a number of colleges.

The seminar has organized a number of sub-groups which will be particularly concerned with the following topics.

- The social prerequisites of project orientation
- Learning theory and evaluation problems relating to project orientation
- The role of the teacher in project orientation
- Organizational aspects of project orientation

The members of the seminar will be responsible within their separate areas for the dissemination of information on project orientation. It will also be their task to support groups and individuals requiring advice or assistance in connection with the commencement or conduct of experimental activities. To this end an information bulletin, "Projektilen", has been started on the subject of project orientation. The first issue has already been published. The idea is for this bulletin to provide an opportunity for the exchange of ideas and experience on the subject of project orientation throughout the higher education sector. "Projektilen" (in Swedish only) can be ordered from Barbro Berg or Inger Johansson at the R & D Unit of the National Swedish Board of Universities and Colleges (UHÄ).

During the autumn of 1976 a questionnaire was compiled and tested on a limited scale. It will be distributed to all programme committees and uni-

versities or colleges. The replies to the questionnaire, which contains questions concerning the occurrence and scope of project-based studies, will be summarized and placed at the disposal of all programme committees and any other interested parties.

During the spring of 1977, a number of seminars will be held and further editions of "Projektilen" will be published. The possible continuation of the project will be discussed during the spring.

Barbro Berg

Inger Johansson

Civiltryck AB Stockholm 1977
LF/ALLF 282 77 008